

Central Intelligence Agency



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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

FEBRUARY 1985

CENTRAL AMERICAN MONTHLY REPORT #19	25 X 1
PERSPECTIVE	
Managua's emphasis on military spending coupled with efforts to maintain essential government imports and cope with severe foreign exchange shortages promises a worsening of the serious economic and financial situation. Continuing oil supply disruptions shut down the country's only refinery again last month, forcing increased rationing for civilians and a drawdown of military reserves. To salvage critical credit lines, the Sandinistas are stalling international creditors and reducing private sector imports. As a result, living standards continue	
to plummet and bankruptcies multiply.	25 X 1
The officially announced increase in defense spending from 25 to 40 percent of the budget will slash resources available for	
social programs and private industry.	25X1
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To offset growing military spending, the regime announced a freeze on government employment and reduced outlays	
for education, medicine and housing.	25X1
This memorandum was prepared by the Central America North	
and South Branches, ALA. It was coordinated with the Directorate	
of Operations. It contains information available as of 5 March 1985. Questions and comments are welcome and should be	
addressed to Chief, Middle America-Caribbean Division, ALA,	25X1
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Out of foreign exchange by 8 February, Managua was forced to devalue the currency for the first time since coming to power, effectively cutting the value of the cordoba in half. To dampen domestic demand for imports further, the Sandinistas also more than doubled prices on many staples and cut other subsidies Wage hikes given at the same time--the first in two years--will, however, only minimally offset the sharp rise in the cost of living, and the US Embassy reports that the increases are insufficient to feed even a middle class family. 25X1 25X1 25X1 Managua is stalling creditors by promising some payments in order to keep remaining credit lines open. unless overdue IMF obligations are settled 25X1 within two months, Nicaragua probably will be ineligible to make further drawings. 25X1 Mexico and Venezuela have rebuffed Managua's requests for oil, citing Nicaragua's overdue debts. 25X1 Continuing disruptions in petroleum shipments have led to the most serious oil shortages in Nicaragua in the last 20 years, 25X1 Although the private sector is pearing the burden of the shortfalls, 25X1 Managua allocates 80 percent of petroleum supplies to the military, and defense reserves are declining. Indeed, military reserves have been used for civilian purposes for the first time, according to the US Embassy. In order to prevent the country from grinding to a complete halt, the Sandinista army provided some 5,000 to 10,000 barrels of gasoline to stations all over the country during the last week in February. 25X1 The oil shortage has also compounded already bleak export prospects, sharpening the decline in production by industry and 25X1

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leaders to demonstrate flexibility by inviting private sector leaders to a public meeting with President Ortega to discuss	On the	domestic front,	the Sandinis	stas continue	d their
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economic policy. The US Embassy reports that the three-hour televised meeting--the first encounter with the business community in three years--resulted in a frank exchange of views, but no government concessions.

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The opposition coalition renewed its attempts to obtain negotiations between the government, insurgents, and political parties on 22 February, calling on the Catholic hierarchy to sponsor such talks. Opposition sources told the US Embassy that the initiative was coordinated with the political exiles and insurgents, who would issue a similar call. Former opposition coalition presidential candidate Arturo Cruz is assisting the insurgents in preparing a draft. According to the US Embassy, it offers a cease-fire and recognition of Ortega's status as provisional president, but demands that the regime lift the state of emergency, pardon all political prisoners, and restore press freedom as minimum requirements for dialogue.

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Military Developments

The Sandinistas used long-range artillery and multi-battalion sweeps in rebel-dominated areas during late January and early February. These tactics forced the insurgents of the Nicaraguan Democratic Force to expend large amounts of scarce munitions and to withdraw some 7,000 troops into Honduras after their supplies were exhausted. Tegucigalpa, adhering to its policy of minimizing the insurgent presence in Honduras, initially gave rebels a mid-month deadline to reinfiltrate into Nicaragua, which it has not vigorously The Honduran military assisted in the transport of insurgent supplies to the forward base camps and even provided non-US origin munitions to facilitate the rebels' rapid return to Nicaragua.

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Rebel activity

also increased in mid-February east of Matagalpa, which necessitated the transfer of two counterinsurgency battalions from operations near the Honduran border to contend with the threat. Meanwhile, Pastora's troops engaged in small-scale hit-and-run operations in the southwest near the Costa Rican border and in the southeast near Nueva Guinea and Rama. Prospects, however, for any substantial anti-Sandinista activity

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continues	uthern front are bleak as Pastora's supply situation to deteriorate
Sandinista down the r both Defer for a "mas reserves,	tees still bear the brunt of the casualties as the as continue using their superior manpower pool to wear rebels. Sandinista resolve was reflected in speeches by use Minister Humberto Ortega and Bayardo Arce calling ssive mobilization" through continued callups of militia, and the draft in hopes of fielding 100,000 men
against th troop inex major loss	me insurgents. Experience and inadequate leadership were responsible for ses near Ocotal, and that some draftees are receiving ays training prior to combat.
Military B	
North Kore commercial nowever, t	that munitions and arms from Iran and three North Korean
sin Hung p Nicaragua.	patrol boats will be on board when the ship departs for
Nicar	agua's helicopter inventory continues to grow. In early
rebruary,	two additional Soviet-made MI-17 medium lift s were delivered, bringing the total of this type to
known MI-2 some of th	A US Embassy source in Sofia has reported the possible of Nicaraguans near the location of Bulgaria's only 4 helicopter regiment. e 50-100 Nicaraguans believed to be in Bulgaria may be attack helicopter training.
andling c	that Soviet technicians are test riying some of located at Sandino International Airport and checking pilots on the aircraft. A Nicaraguan radioman is ommunications between the helicopter and the control
ower, pre	sumably to mask Soviet and Cuban involvement.
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seats and 261 mayoralties have money problems, and we believe the election will be a contest between the Christian Democrats and the loose alliance of the extreme right, led by Roberto D'Aubuisson, and the moderate rightist National Conciliation Party. The Conciliationists claim to be bankrupt and have charged that the extreme right has reneged on a promise to provide funds in exchange for an election coalition.

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The campaign is becoming increasingly personal.
D'Aubuisson--who carried 10 of the country's 14 departments in the presidential runoff last year--has charged that Duarte is soft on the insurgency and that Christian Democratic death squads are responsible for recent assassinations of extreme rightist officials. Duarte, in addition to linking D'Aubuisson to violent acts, has branded him a coconspirator with a party loyalist recently arrested in the United States on suspicion of drug trafficking. In contrast to the acrimonious exchanges between Duarte and D'Aubuisson, the Conciliationists have refrained from rhetorical excesses. We believe this may enable them to rise above the fray and solidify their position as power-broker in the Assembly, where early projections indicate the Christian Democrats will again win only a minority of seats.

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The arrest by US authorities of a D'Aubuisson confidant and confiscation of \$6 million apparently intended for extreme rightist coffers has been a propaganda bonus for the Christian Democrats and the most publicized issue of the campaign so far. The US Embassy indicates that confiscation of the money already may be hurting the ultrarightists' ability to campaign effectively.

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Military

The armed forces took steps this month to improve their operational capabilities while continuing aggressive sweeps through guerrilla strongholds and base areas. The Army launched major sweeps in central and northern El Salvador to disrupt guerrilla logistics and supply activities. In an effort to increase flexibility and effectiveness, the General Staff is trying to standardize operating procedures for the five elite immediate reaction battalions. The Air Force has intensified its use of air power, but its inventory of UH-1H (Huey) helicopters was reduced to 35 when two of them crashed in late February. In addition, the Navy is establishing a Marine infantry battalion on the southeast coastline—to be operational by summer—that will provide a permanent military presence in an area we believe is central to insurgent resupply operations.

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The	Army's continued aggressiveness is forcing the	
guerrilla	as increasingly to resort to small unit tactics and	
economic	sabotage. The rebels sabotaged power lines throughout	
east and	ry in February, caused major traffic disruption in the burned sugar fields and coffee warehouses.	
case, and	the insurgents plan to increase urban terrorism,	
and we be	Elleve the period prior to the 31 March elections will be	
marked by	v increasing violence.	
difficult	the rebels are facing mounting financial	
two large	ties that could hamper their operations, and one of the est guerrilla factions is also beset by dwindling numbers	
and a lea	edership dispute.	
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Economics

The Central Bank took several steps in February to help improve the operation of the parallel foreign exchange market and support the value of its currency. Nevertheless, we estimate that these measures probably will be insufficient to prevent future depreciation of the quetzal. The Central Bank legalized foreign exchange transactions for non-bank exchange houses, allowed more export earnings to be converted at the parallel rate, and urged reluctant exporters to exchange export earnings for quetzales. The value of the quetzal continued to fall, however, until the government announced that it was selling \$30 million of its gold holdings to intervene in the parallel According to the US Embassy, the Central Bank--which lacks sufficient reserves to pump up the currency--may have contracted to repurchase the same amount of gold on the futures market in three months, an action that would further drain meager foreign exchange holdings.

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HONDURAS

<u>Political</u>

We believe the mid-February meeting between senior Honduran and Salvadoran military officers in Tegucigalpa may help defuse recent border tensions and lead to greater military cooperation against the Salvadoran guerrillas. Prior to the meeting, the Hondurans had reacted sharply to alleged Salvadoran incursions into Honduras in pursuit of insurgents, and Armed Forces Chief Lopez even claimed on one occasion that he would order airstrikes to defend his troops if the incursions were repeated. Although participants at the meeting apparently avoided the most contentious bilateral issues—such as Salvadoran access to the Regional Military Training Center—both sides told US Embassy officials that the discussions were productive and that another high-level meeting would be held soon.

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The officers agreed to authorize direct communication between local commanders in border areas, which should reduce the potential for further misunderstandings and avoid accidental Salvadoran attacks on Honduran troops in Honduran territory. Early notice of impending operations, moreover, may encourage the Hondurans to take up blocking positions against guerrilla forces. We believe, however, that the broader territorial dispute is likely to become hostage to election-year politics in both countries and that progress toward a lasting resolution will be halting at best. The Honduran decision late in the month not

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to renew an agreement to train Salvadoran troops at the RMTC underscores the continuing volatility of their bilateral relations.

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Economic

Tegucigalpa is continuing to resist US conditions for disbursing \$148 million in balance-of-payments support. Hondurans object to the US proposed economic stabilization program apparently because it would require a currency devaluation and other austerity measures during an election The Finance Minister has told Embassy officials that Tegucigalpa has developed a contingency plan which compensates for the lack of US funds by accumulating arrearages to international creditors and delaying import approvals. believe, however, that if Honduras continues to delay economic adjustments, the next government--to be elected in November 1985--will inherit a faltering economy and poor relations with international financial institutions.

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COSTA RICA

Political

San Jose, concerned about the Nicaraguan military build-up and deteriorating relations with Managua, took additional steps in February to improve the rudimentary capabilities of its security forces. the government decided to replace the Public Security Ministry's Directorate of Intelligence and Security, long noted for incompetence and corruption, with a new intelligence service direcly responsible to the President. In addition, press reports indicate that Costa Rican officers are receiving military training from Panamanian instructors in Costa Rica and counterinsurgency instruction at the Regional Military Training Center in Honduras.

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Leftwing extremists are continuing to prepare for armed the Mora-Canas Brigade--tne military wing of the Costa Rican People's Party, the official Communist party--now numbers some 300. At any given time, about on half of these are in Nicaragua for training or active duty with the Sandinista Army, and the remainder are training or on leave in Costa Rica. Party elders hope to increase the Bridage's strength to 1,000 armed militants with combat experience over the next two years.

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25X1 Meanwhile, rightists continue their development of a military capability. 25X1

Economic

A recent US Embassy report on economic indicators suggests that the fairly strong gains made last year probably cannot be sustained in 1985. Despite significant improvement in export earnings, payments and international debt problems will continue to hamper long-range economic recovery. The Embassy foresees unrest in the democratic labor movement as well as in the Communist unions. Recent devaluation of the colon and utility price increases have generated additional pressure on workers' ability to maintain their living standard.

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PANAMA

Political/Economic

The state of uncertainty and confrontation in which President Barletta has been embroiled since his October inauguration simmered through February while the Executive Branch and Legislative Assembly struggled to find a politically acceptable solution to the country's fiscal problems. Instead of appeasing the opposition by cutting government expenses, the President submitted a legislative proposal calling for many of the same taxes repudiated in the austerity program last fall. Although Barletta consulted with various groups in an effort to build consensus, business organizations, labor unions, oppposition political parties, and the press continue to demand government cutbacks, especially in the Defense Forces budget.

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Defense Chief Noriega--despite his disappointment in Barletta--has ruled out a military takeover for the time being. Nevertheless, we believe the prospect of continued drift or intensified popular criticism of the military may prompt him to urge the President's resignation.

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REGIONAL PEACE NEGOTIATIONS

A Costa Rican-Nicaraguan dispute over an asylum case led to the cancellation of a meeting of Contadora and Central American Foreign Ministers scheduled for 14-15 February in Panama. A compromise had been	25 X 1
reached, with Managua intending to turn over the Nicaraguan	
asylee to the Contadora Group at the Panama meeting. When the	
Sandinistas balked at the last minute, however, Costa	
Ricabacked by El Salvador and Hondurasrefused to attend, and the Contadora countries called off the session. With	
anti-Sandinista feeling running high in Costa Rica, San Jose	
subsequently recalled its Ambassador and ordered Managua to	
reduce the Nicaraguan mission from 49 to 10,	25X1
At month's and proggues from the dente less	051/4
At month's end, pressure from the Contadora countries apparently had induced the Sandinistas to compromise. Press reports indicate Managua agreed to release the asylee early in March, thereby paving the way for a resumption of negotiations.	25X1
resumption of negotiations.	25X1
In the meantime, Costa Rica, Honduras, and El Salvador	
continued working on a proposal for changes in the verification	25X1
and control section of the draft treaty in the event talks are	
resumed	25X1
	25X1
Guatemala City is remaining aloof to protect its	23/1
relationship with Mexico but,	25X1
three. backs the proposals of the other	• •
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Significant Nicaraguan Political Events

7 February	National Assembly adopts President Ortega's new wage law which regulates labor-management relations and seeks to standardize wage scales in different economic sectors.	25 X 1
ll February	Defense Minister Ortega announces plans to increase military recruiting and training to crush the insurgency.	25 X 1
12 February	Managua devalues cordoba by 50 percent.	25 X 1
13 February	Managua oil refinery closes due to lack of crude.	25X1
14 February	FSLN political coordinator Arce announces plans to increase Nicaraguan military force to 100,000 men.	25X1
14 February	Meeting of Contadora and Central American Foreign Ministers cancelled due to Costa Rican boycott in protest of Nicaraguan intransigence in asylum case.	25 X 1
26 February	President Ortega proposes peaceful solution to problems between US and Nicaragua. US Congress is invited to visit Nicaragua to see what he calls "the truly defensive" nature of Nicaragua's military actions.	25 X 1
27 February	President Ortega announces a new Nicaraguan peace initiative promising to send 100 Cuban military advisors home, to impose an indefinite moratorium on acquiring new weapons systems, and to release the Nicaraguan arrested at Costa Rica's Embassy in Managua after he had sought asylum.	25 X 1

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KEY NICARAGUAN TRAVELS/VISITS

4-6 February	Vice President Ramirez visited Spain, Great Britain, Ireland and France. He signed an agreement with the French for a grant of 10,000 tons of wheat.	25X1
26 February	President Ortega made unpublicized visit to Cuba for high-level meetings, possibly on Contadora and Nicaragua's peace initiatives.	25X1
l March	President Ortega attended the inauguration of Julio Sanguinetti as President of Uruguay.	25X1
15 March	President Ortega to attend inauguration of President-elect Neves in Brazil.	25X1

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CHRONOLOGY OF ARMS FLOW INTO EL SALVADOR

February	a	
	anti-Sandinista unit engaged an	2
	Salvadoran guerrilla unit in Nicaragua's Esteli Department. This is the second	
	recorded instance of FDN forces engaging	
	troops identifying themselves as Salvadorans	
	inside Nicaragua.	
February		
represent		
	in early January a rebel	
	commander, attempting to encourage support for	
	the guerrillas, reassured citizens in the	
	southeast that new supplies and ammunition would be arriving during the next two	
	months.	
February		
	the guerrillas continued to	
	receive rifles, communications gear,	
	explosives, food, and medicine in the latter half of 1984.	
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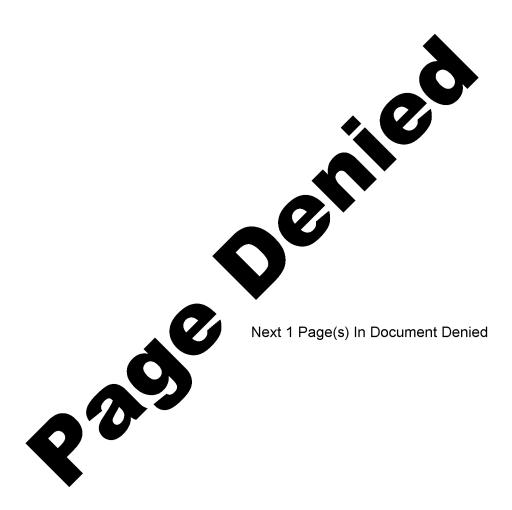
		25X1
16 February	A Salvadoran guerrilla who deserted in Honduras says Cuba and Nicaragua continue to provide weapons, ammunition, and other supplies to the rebels by various land and sea routes.	
		25 X 1
		25X1
20 February	A new insurgent camp is operating on El Arco Island in Jiquilisco Bay near the Jucuaran area This is a well-known transhipment corridor for weapons and munitions originating in Nicaragua. Vehicle tracks on the island's beaches in February are new, suggesting possible recent logistical	25X1 25X1
	activity in this area.	25 X 1

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COMING EVENTS IN CENTRAL AMERICA DURING MARCH

		25X1
mid-March	US-Honduran working subgroup meetings resume to discuss security relationship.	25X1
21-22 March	Contadora countries vice foreign ministers to meet in Panama to discuss the draft treaty.	25X1
27 March	Local elections in Belize.	25X1
31 March	Legislative and municipal elections in El Salvador.	25 X 1

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